



**Report to the Legislature**

**Foster Parent Retention and Stability of  
Foster Placements**

Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 202(6)

October 2002

Department of Social & Health Services  
Children's Administration  
Division Program and Policy Development  
PO Box 45710  
Olympia, WA 98504-5710  
(360) 902-7913  
Fax: (206) 902-7903

# **FOSTER PARENT RETENTION AND STABILITY OF FOSTER PLACEMENTS**

Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 202(6)

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report is provided in accordance with the 2001 budget proviso requiring the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to report quarterly to the Legislature “progress against appropriate baseline measures for foster parent retention and stability of foster placements.” This report is for the period ending September 30, 2002.

*The Building a Future for Washington’s Children: Foster Care Improvement Plan* is a major component of the *Kids Come First Action Agenda*. This collaborative effort between the DSHS Children’s Administration and Casey Family Programs was published in May 2001 and was designed to develop long-term solutions to the challenges facing the foster care system. Key foster care and child welfare workers from throughout Washington State spent many hours working to create this framework to improve the retention of foster parents.

The retention of skilled and experienced foster parents is crucial in meeting the needs of vulnerable children placed in the child welfare system. When sufficient homes are available, children can be placed with families who are better equipped to provide for their unique needs. This in turn is likely to improve the stability of their placements during the time they must remain in foster care away from their own families. These key outcomes of increased stability for children and increased retention of foster parents continue to be important strategic focuses of the Children’s Administration.

The information presented in this report begins with baseline data as of July 1, 2001, and presents quarterly data from July 1, 2001, through June 30, 2002.

## **RETENTION OF FOSTER HOMES**

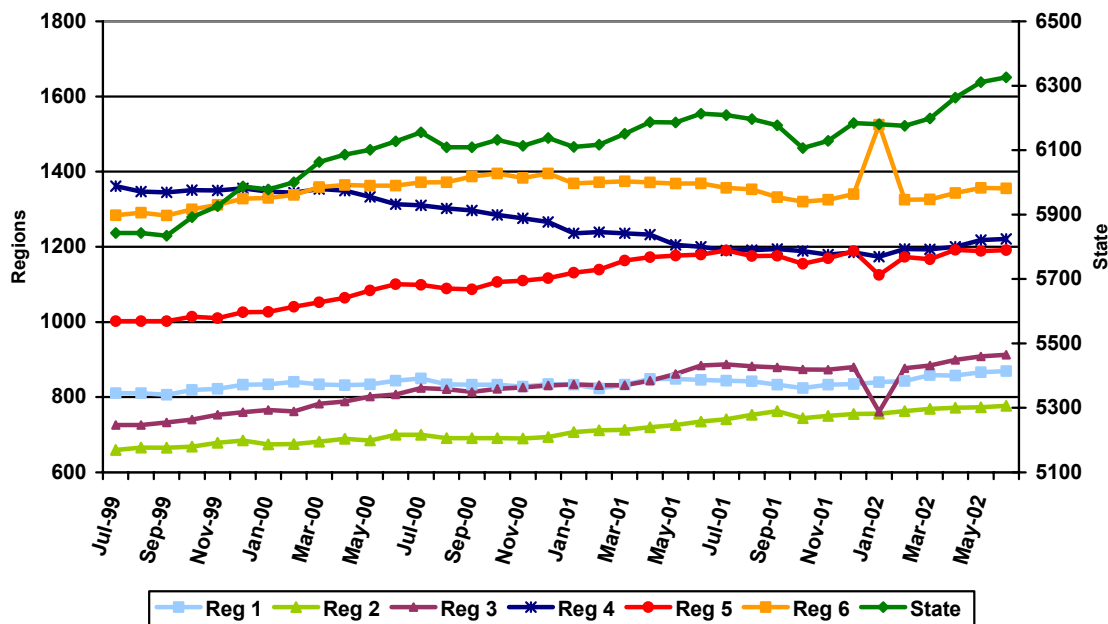
The Children’s Administration (CA) has been measuring foster home retention based on the net increase or decrease in the total number of licensed foster homes. The Children’s Administration recognizes that both the retention of currently licensed homes and the recruitment and licensure of new homes impact the total number of licensed foster homes; therefore, the current measure is, at best, a proxy of retention. The Children’s Administration is exploring the issues around a possible new method to measure retention by measuring the turnover rate of foster parents.

## Number of Licensed Foster Homes

RETENTION	July 1, 2001 Homes (Run 7/01)	July 1, 2001 Homes (Run 12/01)	September 30, 2001 Homes	December 31, 2001 Homes	March 31, 2002 Homes	June 30, 2002 Homes	Percent Change in Available Homes (7/01- 6/02)
<b>Statewide baseline</b>	6,396	6,209	6,177	6,184	6,229	6,326	1.9%
<b>Region 1</b>	859	844	833	835	845	869	3%
<b>Region 2</b>	777	741	763	755	780	777	4.9%
<b>Region 3</b>	902	887	879	880	905	913	2.9%
<b>Region 4</b>	1,260	1,190	1,194	1,185	1,188	1,221	2.6%
<b>Region 5</b>	1,224	1,190	1,176	1,189	1,191	1,191	0
<b>Region 6</b>	1,374	1,357	1,332	1,340	1,320	1,355	0

It is a priority of the CA to increase the number of foster homes available to care for children and to improve the accuracy of foster home records. In August and September 2001, CA's Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) engaged in a data clean up effort to better identify available homes through more accurate recording in the automated Case and Management Information System (CAMIS). This cleanup resulted in the closure of 187 homes in the automated system (see comparison of before and after data for July in chart above), but resulted in no change in the actual number of available homes. The numbers above indicate a steady increase in the number of homes over period of the report after the data clean up is taken into account.

## State and Regional Trends, Total Homes



## STABILITY OF PLACEMENTS

The number of children in stable placements continues to show an upward trend in most regions and the state as indicated in the chart below. The Children's Administration measures stability of placements using the federal measure of "the percent (of children) with no more than two placements during the first 12 months in care."

### Percent of Children with No More than Two Placements during First Twelve Months in Care

Stability Placements	July 1, 2001	September 30, 2001	December 31, 2001	March 31, 2002	June 30, 2002	% change
Statewide	81.1 %	81.1%	81.6%	82.4%	85.5%	4.4
Region 1	86.9 %	87.1%	87.3%	90.3%	91%	4.1
Region 2	79.4 %	77.8%	76.3%	76.7%	82%	2.6
Region 3	76.9 %	76.9%	76.9%	75.8%	76%	(.9)
Region 4	78.6 %	80.7%	79.7%	78.9%	84.5%	5.9
Region 5	81.8 %	82.9%	83.0%	84.3%	88.1%	6.3
Region 6	82.4 %	84.5%	84.7%	86.4%	87.8%	5.4

## WORK IN PROGRESS

Through the Foster Care Improvement Plan (FCIP), a draft proposal to improve support for foster parents – with the goal of increasing retention – is circulating for review and comment.

The proposal was developed by a Support Network Team of the Foster Care Improvement Plan. The team included state employees, private agency workers, foster parents and others, who met for several months this year.

The proposal is built on the existing liaison program as set forth in RCW 74.13.340. That law requires liaisons as supporters, advocates, and troubleshooters on issues that arise between foster parents and CA workers.

Under the proposal, the liaisons would be part of a private agency, as they are now. Under this draft proposal, liaisons would help build foster parent hubs. In a hub, one foster family is at the center of several other families, helping coordinate support, respite and other activities. The model also envisions the liaisons helping build a buddy system where appropriate, matching new foster parents with more veteran foster parents. The model also envisions a centralized administrative arm with an administrator, data manager and public relations/communications person. Potential costs of the model are being identified.

The Executive Committee of the Foster Care Improvement Plan is aware of the details of the proposal and will have further discussions about it this fall.

## **Respite Policy**

The Children's Administration also has adopted a new policy for respite, long identified by foster parents, child welfare advocates and others as a key issue in support.

Among the new features of the respite policy are a "retention respite" system and standardized rates for the payment of respite. Retention respite gives each foster parent two days of respite per month for each of the children in the home. The foster parent can "bank" up to 14 days to take at one time. The idea of retention respite is to provide a regular relief valve that foster parents often need. The standardized rates – one payment rate for children identified as Level 1 and Level 2 and a higher rate for those identified as Level 3 or Level 4 – ensure equity across the state in respite payment to foster parents.

The goal of standardizing respite policy is an action item in the Foster Care Improvement Plan.

## **Breakthrough Series Collaborative**

A six-member team of the FCIP also was chosen by Casey Family Programs to be part of its national Breakthrough Series Collaborative. The state team will be led by Rosalyn Oreskovich, Assistant Secretary for CA. The pilot site will be based out of Region 2 in Yakima.

The work of the collaborative will focus on quickly testing ideas for the retention and recruitment of foster parents, sharing the ideas with other teams from around the country, and receiving training from Casey Family Programs on how to make rapid changes across a large system.

Ideas about support and recruitment of foster parents generated by the FCIP and from others can be tested in this collaborative. The goal is to use expertise gleaned from across the country to significantly improve the foster care system. Ideas can be tested in one region and those that prove to be successful as pilots will be implemented statewide.

## **Culture Change**

Among the items that can be tested through the collaborative are ways to improve the culture to provide a better relationship between foster parents and CA. That goal is the center of the FCIP.

Forums among social workers, foster parents, private agency workers, and others have begun in various parts of the state as part of an attempt to create an ongoing dialogue about issues and exchange of information.

Representatives of DSHS will participate in training from the American Public Welfare Association on how to make culture change at the highest levels of an organization. Members of the FCIP will continue efforts to meet the challenge of changing the culture.

Satisfied, supported foster parents are the best resource CA has for taking care of the children who come into the state system. The lives of those children will remain more stable with such a pool of foster parents and other caregivers.

### **Placement Stability**

Among the initiatives being undertaken to help ensure greater stability is the committee working on Senate Bill 6709, which aims to keep more children in their schools when they come into state care.

In addition, Families for Kids Recruitment Resources (FFK-RR), which holds the recruitment contract with CA, is working on specific plans to recruit homes that can best help keep kids in their communities and schools. This is part of the new Needs Assessment and Recruitment Plan process established this last quarter in an amended contract with FFK-RR.

The Children's Administration continues efforts to improve public awareness and support for kinship care in the state. A committee of the FCIP has met with the African-American Unit in Region 4. The goal is to find ways to keep more children with relatives so they don't go into foster care and to return more children from foster care into homes to live with relatives. The workgroup established as part of House Bill 1397 is discussing recommendations to enhance kinship care.